MY ADVENTURE

IN

THE FLYING SCOTSMAN:

A ROMANCE OF

London and North-Western Railway Shares.

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS.

PRICE SIXPENCE.

A RAILWAY ROMANCE.

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UPB

INTRODUCTION.

THE following story was told me by that meek but estimable little man who forms the central figure in it. I have made him relate the strange vicissitudes of his life in the first person, and, by doing so, preserve, I venture to believe, some quaintness of thought and expression that is characteristic of him.

MY ADVENTURE

IN

THE FLYING SCOTSMAN.

CHAPTER I.

A DANGEROUS LEGACY.

THE rain gave over about five o'clock, and the sun, having struggled unavailingly all day with a leaden November sky, burst forth in fiery rage, when but a few short minutes separated him from the horizon. His tawny splendour surrounded me as I trudged from Richmond, in Surrey, to the neighbouring hamlet of Petersham. Above me the wet, naked branches of the trees shone red, and seemed to drip with blood; the hedgerows

sparkled their flaming gems; in the meadows, which I struck across to save time, parallel streaks of crimson lay along the cart-ruts. All nature glowed in the lurid light, and, to a mind fraught with much trouble and anxiety, there was something sinister in the slowly dying illumination, in the lowering, savage sky, in the bars of blood that sank hurtling together into the west, and in the vast cloudlands of gloom that were now fast bringing back the rain and the night.

Should you ask what reason I, John Lott, a small, middle-aged, banking clerk, who lived in North London, might have for thus rushing away from the warm fire, good wife, pretty daughter, and comforting tea-cake, that were all at this moment awaiting me somewhere in Kilburn, I would reply, that death, sudden and startling, had brought about this earthquake in my orderly existence. Should you again naturally suggest that a four-wheeled cab might have effected with greater

cleanliness and dispatch, than my short legs, the country journey between Richmond and Petersham, I would admit the fact, but, at the same time, advance sufficiently sound reasons why that muddy walk was best undertaken on foot. For, touching this death, but one other living man could have equal interest in it with myself; and for me, especially, were entwined round about it issues of very grave and stupendous moment. Honour, rectitude, my duty to myself and to my neighbour, together with other no less important questions, were all at stake; and upon my individual judgment, blinded by no thoughts of personal danger or self-interest, must the case be decided. I had foreseen this for some years, had given much consideration to the matter; but no satisfactory solution of the difficulties at any time presented itself, and now the long anticipated circumstance arrived, as it always does with men of my calibre, to find him most

involved and concerned in the conduct of affairs, least qualified to cope with them. Why I walked to Oak Lodge, Petersham, then, was to gain a few minutes, to collect my wandering wits and acquire a mental balance capable of meeting the troubles that awaited me. What I had been unable to accomplish in two years, however, did not seem likely to be effected in twenty minutes; and, indeed, the angry sunset, together with an element of grave personal danger already mentioned, combined to drive all reasonable trains of thought from my head. Ultimately I arrived at my destination, with a mind about as concentrated and purposes about as strong as those of a drowned worm.

And wherefore all this misery, do you suppose? Simply because an estimable lady had just been pleased to leave me a comfortable matter of ten thousand pounds. So far good; but when I say that I am not related to the deceased, that her next of kin has for

the past fifteen years been seeking an opportunity to take my life, and that a meeting between us is now imminent, it will be noticed the case presents certain unusual difficulties. This assertion—that a man has sought to rob me of my insignificant existence for fifteen years—doubtless appears so preposterous, that it is best I should clearly explain the matter at once. A scrap of the past must here, then, be intercalated between my arrival at Oak Lodge and the events which followed it.

Upon my father's death, my mother, who was at that time not much over twenty years of age, married again with one George Beakbane, a wealthy farmer and owner of a comfortable freehold estate in Norfolk. This property had for its title the family name of Beakbane.

My step-father, after one son was born to him, lost his young wife, and was left with two infants upon his hands. Right well he

treated both, making no sort of distinction, but sharing his love between us, and, after we were of an age to benefit from a man's training, bringing us up under his own eye and in his own school. It was a Spartan entry upon life for young Joshua Beakbane and myself; but whereas I thrived under the puritanic and colourless regime, Mr. Beakbane's own son, a youth by nature prone to vicious habits and evil communications, chafed beneath the iron rule, which only became more unbending in consequence. There was much to be said on either side, no doubt; though none could have foreseen, as a result of those trifling restraints and paternal rebukes, the great and terrible punishment that would fall both upon father and son.

When he was twenty-one years of age, Joshua Beakbane, in a fit of mad folly, that to me is scarcely conceivable, ran away from the Farm, taking with him about five hundred pounds of his father's money. He was pur-

sued, arrested, and committed for trial at the next assizes. Old George Beakbane, a just, proud man, sprung from a race that had ever been just and proud, would listen to no plea of mercy. There was none to speak for the culprit but me—his half-brother; and my prayers were useless. The father sent his son to gaol, blotted his name from the family tree, and, after that day, regarded me as his heir. That I should change my name to Beakbane was a stipulation of my step-father, and this I had no objection to doing. My inclinations and ambitions were towards art, but such prospects as a painter's life could promise were distasteful to George Beakbane, and I relinquished them. Joshua's sentence amounted to ten years of penal servitude, and it was the wish of my life at that time to some day bring about a reconciliation between father and son. Any of the great advantages accruing to myself through the present arrangements I would have gladly foregone to see the old

man happy; for him I loved sincerely, and clearly saw, as the time went by, that all joy had faded out of his life after his son went to prison. Long before the ten years were fulfilled, however, George Beakbane died and I succeeded to the estate. And here I solemnly declare and avow, before heaven and men, that my intention from the first moment of accepting the mastership of Beakbane, was, by doing so, to benefit him whom I still considered the rightful owner thereof. Upon Joshua's release I fully purposed an act of abdication in his favour. I should, had all gone well, have taken such legal measures as might be convenient to the case, and reinstated my relative in that situation which, but for his own reckless folly, had all along been proper to him. Now the ability to do so much for Joshua Beakbane would not have been mine, unless I had consented to become the heir; because, failing me, old George Beakbane might have sought and

found another inheritor for his property; and one, likely enough, without my moral principles or ultimate intentions.

All was ordered very differently to what I hoped and desired, however. One short year before my half-brother would have relieved me of my responsibilities, a concatenation of dire events brought ruin and destruction upon me. I have never attempted to deny my own miserable weakness in this matter. I had married during my stewardship, and for my wife's brother, a man as I believed of sterling honesty and considerable wealth, I consented to 'back' certain bills, as a matter of convenience for some two or three months. Again I admit my criminal frailty; but with the fact and its consequences we have now to deal. My brother-in-law's entanglements increased, and he cut the knot by blowing his brains out, leaving me with a stupendous mountain of debt staring me in the face. The Beakbane property went

to meet it. Every acre was mortgaged, every mortgage foreclosed upon, the estate ceased to exist as a whole. The debt was ultimately discharged, and I, with my wife and child, came to London. These things reaching Joshua Beakbane's ears about a month before his sentence expired, shattered his hopes and ambitions for the future, left him absolutely a pauper, and terribly excited his rage and indignation against me. I had not trusted myself to tell him the fatal news; but in the ear of my messenger, a lawyer, he hissed an awful oath that, did we ever meet, my life would pay the debt I owed him. Knowing the man to have some of his father's iron fixity of purpose, together with much varied wickedness peculiar to himself, and for which our mutual mother was in no way responsible, I took him at his word, changed my name yet again, and buried myself in the metropolis. Here I very quickly found that my art was not of a sort to keep my wife and child, when

the question of painting to sell came to be considered. I therefore sought more solid employment, and was fortunate to obtain a position in Messrs. Macdonald's bank. Years rolled by to the number of fifteen. Joshua Beakbane sought me high and low; indeed, I am fully persuaded that his desire to take my life became a monomania with him, for he left no stone unturned to come at me. But I wore spectacles of dark blue glass when about in the streets, and always shaved clean from the time of my entry on life in London. Several times I met my half-brother, till becoming gradually assured of my safety, I grew bold and employed a private detective to discover his home and occupation. Thus I learned that most of his time was spent in attending race meetings, and that he enjoyed some notoriety amongst the smaller fry of bookmakers.

Let the reader possess his soul in patience a short half page longer and these tedious

but necessary preliminaries will be ended. Miss Sarah Beakbane-Minifie, the lady whose death has just been recorded, was a near relation of my half-brother, but, of course, no connection of mine. Me, however, she esteemed very highly, and always had done so, from the time that my mother married into her family. Having watched my career narrowly, being convinced of my integrity, misfortunes, and honourable motives in the past, she had seen fit to regard me as a martyr and a notable person; though her own kinsman received but scant acknowledgment at her hands. And now her entire fortune, specie, bonds and shares, was mine, and Joshua Beakbane found himself once more in the cold. What were his feelings and intentions? I asked myself. Was he still disposed as of old towards me, and would he prefer my life to any earthly advancement I might now be in a position to extend to him? Would he accept a compromise?

Should I meet him at Petersham, and if so, should I ever leave Oak Lodge excepting feet foremost? What was my clear duty in the case, and would the doing of it be likely to facilitate matters? Such were some of the questions to which I could find no replies as I walked slowly through the mud, and then, feeling that suspense only made the future look more terrific, struck across the fields, as aforesaid, and became eager to reach my destination as quickly as possible.

Come what might, if alive, I was bound to start for Scotland on the following day to be witness in a legal case pending against my firm; and the recollection of this duty was uppermost in my thoughts when I finally reached Oak Lodge. Martha Prescott and her husband, the deceased lady's sole retainers, greeted me, and their grief appeared sufficiently genuine as I was ushered by them to the drawing-room. This apartment—charming enough in the summer when the French

windows were always open, and the garden without, a mass of red and white roses, syringa, and other homely flowers—was now dark and cheerless. The blinds were not drawn, the last dim gleams of daylight appeared more dreary than total gloom. A decanter of port wine with some dried fruits stood upon the table, and I am disposed to think that one, at least, of the two men sitting by the fire had been smoking. For a moment I believed the taller and younger of these to be my enemy, but a flicker of fire-light showed the mistake as both rose to meet me.

Mr. Plenderleath, my dead friend's solicitor, a flabby, pompous gentleman, with a scent of eau-de-Cologne about him and a nice choice of language, shook my hand and his head in the most perfect unison. Joshua Beakbane, he informed me, had been communicated with, but as yet no answer to the telegram was received.

"For yourself, I beg you will accept my condolence and congratulations in one breath, dear sir. When such a woman as Miss Beakbane-Minifie must die, it is well to feel that such a man as Mr. Lott shall have the administration of that which the blessed deceased cannot take with her. My lamented client and your aunt has left you, dear sir, the considerable fortune of one hundred thousand pounds."

"She is not any relation; but, my good sir, the deceased lady always led me to understand that ten thousand pounds or so was the sum-total of her wealth."

"The admirable woman intentionally deceived you, dear sir, in order that your surprise and joy might be the greater. And by a curious circumstance, which your aunt's eccentricities have effected, I can this very evening show you most of your property, or what stands for it."

"Miss Beakbane-Minifie was not my aunt,"

I repeated; but Mr. Plenderleath paid no heed to me and wandered on.

"God forbid," he said, "that I should say any word which might reflect in your mind, no matter how remotely, on the blessed defunct. Still the truth remains—that your aunt, during the latter days of her life, developed instincts only too common in age, though none the less painful for that. A certain distrust, almost bordering upon suspicion, prompted her to withdraw from my keeping the divers documents, certificates, and so forth that represented the bulk of her property, and which, I need hardly observe, were as safe in my fire-proof iron strong-room as in the Bank of England. Have them she would, however, and I confess to you, dear sir, that the knowledge of so much wealth hidden in this comparatively lonely and ill-guarded old house has caused me no slight uneasiness. But all is well that ends well, we may now say, and the

danger being past, need not revert to it. True, this mass of money must stay here for the present, but, I assume, you will not leave this establishment again until the last rites have been performed. One more word and I have done. I find upon looking into the estate that your aunt has been realizing considerable quantities of stock quite recently upon her own judgment without any reference to me. The wisdom of such negotiations we need not now discuss. Nothing but good of the blessed dead. However, the money is here; indeed, no less a sum than thirteen thousand pounds, in fifty-pound notes, lies upon yonder table. Now your aunt—"

"Please understand, sir," I explained testily, "that, once and for all, the deceased lady was no relation to me whatever."

I felt in one of those highly-strung, sensitive moods which men occasionally chance upon, and in which the reiteration of some trivial error or expression blinds them to

proper reflection on the business in hand, no matter how momentous. Moreover, the suggestion that I should stop in the lonely house of death to guard my wealth that night, was abominable. Without my wife or some equally capable person I would not have undertaken such a vigil for the universe.

"I apologize," said Mr. Plenderleath, in answer to my rebuke. "I was about to remark when you interrupted me, that Miss Beakbane-Minifie's principal source of increment was a very considerable number of shares in the London and North-Western Railway. The certificates for these are also here. Now, to conclude, dear sir. Upon Mr. Joshua Beakbane's arrival, which should not be long delayed, you and he can appoint a day for the funeral, after which event I will, of course, read the will in the presence of yourself and such few others as may be interested therein. Your aunt passed calmly away, I understand, about four o'clock this

morning. Her end was peace. For myself, I need only say that I should not be here to-night in the usual order of events. But the good Prescotts, ignorant of your address, telegraphed to me in their sad desolation, and, as a Christian man, I deemed it my duty to respond to their call without loss of time."

Mr. Plenderleath sighed, bowed, and resumed his seat after drinking a glass of wine. Candles were brought in, and I then explained to the solicitor something of my relations with Joshua Beakbane, also the danger that a possible meeting between us might mean for me. The legal brain was deeply interested by those many questions this statement of mine gave rise to. He saw the trial that any sojourn in Oak Lodge must be to me, and was, moreover, made fully alive to the fact that I had not the slightest intention of stopping there beyond another hour or so. I own I was in a terribly nervous condition; and a man can no more

help the weakness of his nerves than the colour of his hair.

It then transpired that the third person of our party was Mr. Plenderleath's junior clerk, a taciturn, powerful young fellow, with a face I liked the honest look of. He offered, if we approved the suggestion, to keep watch and ward at Petersham during the coming night. Mr. Plenderleath pooh-poohed the idea as being ridiculous beyond the power of words to express; but finding I was not of his opinion, declared that, for his part, if I really desired such an arrangement he would allow the young man to remain in the house until after the will was read and the property legally my own.

"Personally I would trust Mr. Sorrell with anything," declared the solicitor; "but whether you, a stranger to him, are right in doing the same, I will not presume to say." The plan struck me as being excellent, however, and was accordingly determined upon.

And now there lay before me a duty which, in my present frame of mind, I confess I had no stomach for. Propriety demanded that I should look my last on the good friend who was gone, and I prepared to do so. Slowly I ascended the stairs and hesitated at the bed-chamber door before going into the presence of death. At this moment I felt no sorrow at hearing a soft foot-fall in the apartment. Martha Prescott was evidently within, and I entered, somewhat relieved at not having to undergo the ordeal alone. My horror, as may be supposed, was very great then to find the room empty. All I saw of life set my heart thumping at my ribs, and fastened me to the spot upon which I stood. There was another door at the further end of this room, and through it I just caught one glimpse of Joshua Beakbane's broad back as he vanished, closing the door after him. There could be no mistake. Two shallow steps led up to the said door,

and it only gave access to a narrow apartment scarce bigger than a cupboard. The dead lady, with two wax candles burning at her feet, lay an insignificant atom in the great canopied bed. The room was tidy, and everything decent and well ordered, save that the white cerement which was wrapped about the corpse had been moved from off her face. But death so calm and peaceful as this paled before the terror of what I had witnessed. I dare not convince myself by rushing to the door through which my enemy had disappeared. My hair stood upon end. A vile sensation, as of ants creeping on my flesh, came over me. I turned, shuddering, and somehow found myself once more with the men I had left. I told my adventure, only to be politely laughed at by both. The young clerk, whose name was Sorrell, offered to make careful search of the premises, and calling the Prescotts, we went up with haste to seek the cause of my alarm. The

door through which, as I believed, Joshua Beakbane had made his exit from the death-chamber yielded to us without resistance, and the small receptacle into which it opened was empty. Some of the dead lady's dresses were hung upon the walls, and these, with an old oaken trunk containing linen, which had rosemary and camphor in it to keep out the moths, were all we could find. The window was fastened, and the wooden shutters outside in their place. Young Sorrell had some ado to keep from laughing at my discomfiture, but we silently returned past where the two candles were burning and rejoined Mr. Plenderleath. That gentleman at my request consented to stay and dine, after which meal he and I would return to town together. He urged me to drink something more generous than claret, which, being quite unstrung, I did do, and was gradually regaining my mental balance when a circumstance occurred that threw me into a greater fit of prostration

than before. A telegram arrived for Mr. Plenderleath, and was read aloud by him. It ran as follows :—

"*Joshua Beakbane died third November. Caught chill on Cambridgeshire day of Newmarket Houghton Meeting. Body unclaimed, buried by parish.*"

"Now this communication—" began Mr. Plenderleath in his pleasing manner, but broke off upon seeing the effect of the telegram on me.

"My dear sir, you are ill. What is the matter now? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"Man alive, *I have!*" I shrieked out. "What can be clearer? A vision of Joshua Beakbane has evidently been vouchsafed me, and—and—I wish devoutly that it were not so."

The hatefulness of this reflection blinded me for some time to my own good fortune.

Here, in one moment, was all my anxiety and tribulation swept away. The incubus of fifteen long years had rolled off my life, and the future appeared absolutely unclouded. To this great fact the solicitor now invited my attention, and congratulated me with much warmth upon the happy turn affairs had taken. But it was long before I could remotely realize the situation, long before I could grasp my freedom, very long before I could convince myself that the shadow I had seen but recently, flitting from the side of the dead, had only existed in my own overwrought imagination.

After dinner, while half an hour still remained before the fly would call for Mr. Plenderleath and me, we went together through the papers and memoranda he had collected from his late client's divers desks and boxes. Young Sorrell was present, and naturally took considerable interest in the proceedings.

"Of course, Mr. Lott," he said, laughing,

"against ghosts all my care must be useless. And still, as ghosts are impalpable, they could hardly walk off with this big bag here, and its contents."

We were now slowly placing the different documents in a leathern receptacle Mr. Plenderleath had found, well suited to the purpose.

I was looking at a share certificate of the London and North-Western Railway, when Mr. Sorrell addressed me again.

"I am a great materialist myself, sir," he declared, "and no believer in spiritualistic manifestations of any sort; but everybody should be open to conviction. Will you kindly give me some description of the late Mr. Joshua Beakbane? Then, if anything untoward appears, I shall be better able to understand it."

For answer, and not heeding upon what I was working, I made as good a sketch as need be of my half-brother. Martha Prescott,

who now arrived to announce the cab, said as far as she remembered the original of the drawing, it was life-like. It should have been so, for if one set of features more than another were branded on my mind, those lineaments belonged to Joshua Beakbane. When I had finished my picture, and not before, I discovered that I had been drawing upon the back of a share certificate already mentioned.

Then Mr. Plenderleath and I left the gloomy, ill-lighted abode of death, bidding Mr. Sorrell good-night, and feeling distinct satisfaction at once again being in the open air. I speak for myself, but am tolerably certain that, in spite of his pompous exterior, the solicitor was well-pleased to get back to Richmond, and from the quantity of hot brandy and water he consumed while waiting for the London train, I gathered that even his ponderous nerves had been somewhat shaken.

There was much for me to tell my wife

and daughter on returning to Kilburn, and the small hours of morning had already come before we retired to sleep, and thank God for this wonderful change in our fortunes.

But the thought of that brave lad guarding my wealth troubled me. I saw the silent house buried in darkness; I saw the great black expanse of garden and meadow, the rain falling heavily down, and the trees tossing their lean arms into the night. I thought of the little form lying even more motionless than those who slept—mayhap with a dim ghostly watcher still beside it. I thought, in fine, of many mysterious horrors, and allowed my mind to move amidst a hundred futile alarms.

CHAPTER II.

THE "FLYING SCOTSMAN."

With daylight, or such drear apology for it as a London November morning allows, I arose, prepared for my journey to the north, and wrote certain letters before starting for the city. The monotonous labours of a clerk's life were nearly ended now; the metropolis —a place both my wife and I detested— would soon see the last of us; already I framed in my mind the letter which should shortly be received by the bank manager announcing my resignation. It may perhaps have been gathered that I am a weak man in some ways, and I confess these little

preliminaries to my altered state gave me a sort of pleasure. The ladies argued throughout breakfast as to the locality of our new home, and paid me such increased attentions as befit the head of a house who, from being but an unimportant atom in the machinery of a vast money-making establishment, suddenly himself blossoms into a man of wealth. Thus had two successive fortunes accrued to me through my mother's second marriage; and no calls of justice or honour could quarrel with my right to administer this second property as I thought fit. For Joshua Beakbane had left no family, and, concerning others bearing his name, I did not so much as know if any existed. To town I went, and taking no pains to conceal my prosperity, was besieged with hearty congratulations and desires to drink, at my expense, to continued good fortune. How brief was that half-hour of triumph, and what a number of friends I found among my colleagues in men whom

I had always suspected of quite a contrary disposition towards me!

I had scarcely settled to a clear mastery of the business that would shortly take me towards Scotland, when a messenger reached me from Mr. Plenderleath. The solicitor desired to see me without delay, and obtaining leave, I drove to his chambers in Chancery Lane.

Never shall I forget the sorry sight my smug, sententious friend presented; never before have I seen any fellow-creature so nearly reduced to the level of a jelly-fish. He was sitting in his private room, his letters unopened, his overcoat and scarf still upon him. A telegram lay at his feet, after reading which he had evidently sank into his chair and not moved again. He pointed to the message as I entered, shutting the door behind me. It came from Petersham, and ran as follows—

"*Window drawing-room open this morning. Gentleman gone, bag gone.*"

A man by nature infirm of purpose, will sometimes show unexpected determination when the reverse might be feared from him; and now, finding Mr. Plenderleath utterly crushed by intelligence that must be more terrible to me than any other, I rose to the occasion in a manner very surprising and gratifying to myself.

"Quick! Up, man! This is no time for delay," I exclaimed. "For God's sake stir yourself. We should be half way to Petersham by now. There has been foul play here. Mr. Sorrell's life may be in danger, if not already sacrificed. Rouse yourself, sir, I beg."

He looked at me wonderingly, shook his head, and murmured something about my being upon the wrong tack altogether. He then braced himself to face the situation, and prepared to accompany me to Petersham. Upon the way to Waterloo, we wired for a detective from Scotland Yard to follow us, and in less than another hour were driving

from Richmond to Oak Lodge. Then, but not till then, did Mr. Plenderleath explain to me his views and fears, which came like a thunderclap.

"Your ardour and generous eagerness, dear sir, to succour those in peril, almost moves me to tears," he began; "but these intentions are futile, or I am no man of law. It is my clerk, Walter Sorrell, we must seek, truly; but not where you would seek him. *He* is the thief, Mr. Lott—I am convinced of that. I saw no reason last night to fear any danger from without, and I hinted as much. My only care at any time was the man of questionable morals, who has recently gone to his rest. No; Sorrell has succumbed to the temptation, and it is upon my head that the punishment falls."

He was terribly prostrated, talked somewhat wildly of such recompense as lay within his powers, and appeared to have relinquished all hopes of my ever coming by my property

again. This plain solution of the theft had honestly never occurred to me, until advanced with such certainty by my companion. The affair, in truth, appeared palpable enough to the meanest comprehension, and I said nothing further about violence or possible loss of life.

Even more unquestionable seemed the solicitor's explanation when we reached Petersham, and heard what the Prescotts had to tell us. The local Inspector of Police and two subordinates were already upon the scene, but had done nothing much beyond walk up and down on a flower-bed outside the drawing-room window, and then re-enter the house.

Sarah Prescott's elaboration of the telegram was briefly this :—

She had lighted a fire in a comfortable bedroom on the upper floor, and, upon asking the young man to come and see it, was surprised to learn he proposed sitting up through

the night. "My husband," said Mrs. Prescott, "did not like the hearing of this, and was for watching the gentleman from the garden just to see that he meant no harm; but I over-persuaded him from such foolishness, as I thought it. The last thing before going to my bed, I brought the gent a scuttle of coals and some spirits and hot water. He was then reading a book he had fetched down from that book-case, and said that he should do well now, what with his pipe and the things I'd got for him. He gave me 'good-night' as nice as ever I heard a gentleman say it; then I heard him lock the door on the inside as I went away. This morning, at seven o'clock, I fetched him a cup of tea and some toast I'd made. The door was wide open, so was the window, and the bag that stood on the table last night had gone. The gent wasn't there either, of course."

Long we talked after this statement, waiting for the detective from London to come.

Continually some one or other of the men assembled let his voice rise with the interest of the conversation. Then Mrs. Prescott would murmur 'hush,' and point upwards to where the silent dead was lying.

A careful scrutiny of the drawing-room showed that Sorrell's vigil had been a short one. The fire had not been made up after Mrs. Prescott left the watcher; a novel, open at page five, lay face downwards upon the table; a pipe of tobacco, which had only just been lighted and then suffered to go out, was beside it, together with a tumbler of spirit-and-water, quite full, and evidently not so much as sipped from. The defaulter's hat and coat were gone from their place in the hall, as also his stick. Mrs. Prescott had picked up a silk neckerchief in the passage that led to the drawing-room from the hall. A chair was overturned in the middle of the room; but beyond this no sign of anything untoward could be found. A small seedy-

looking man from London soon afterwards arrived, and quickly and quietly made himself master of the situation so far as it was at present developed. The Prescotts and their information interested him chiefly. After hearing all they could tell him he examined the room for himself, attaching enormous importance to a trifle that had escaped our attention. This was a candle by the light of which Walter Sorrell read his book. It had evidently burned for some time after the room was deserted, but not down to the socket. The grease had guttered all upon one side, and a simple experiment showed the cause. Lighting another candle and placing it on the same spot, it burned steadily until both window and door were opened. Then, however, the flame flickered in the draught thus set up; the grease began to gutter, and the candle threatened to go out at any moment.

"What do you gather from that?" I inquired of the detective.

"This," he answered; "taking account of the open window and door, the overturned chair and the candle left burning, it's clear enough that when the gent did go out, he went in the devil of a hurry, made a bolt, in fact, as though some one was on his track at the very start. There's no one else in the house, you say?"

"Only the blessed dead," said Mr. Plenderleath.

But I thought involuntarily of what I had seen the preceding evening. Could it be that some horrid vision had appeared in the still hours of night, and that, eager for his employer's welfare, even in such a terrible moment, the young man had seized my wealth and leapt out into the dark night rather than face the dire and monstrous phantom?

If so, what had become of him?

The detective made no further remarks, and refused to answer any questions, though he asked several. Then, after a long and fruitless search in the grounds and meadow-land adjacent, he returned to town, his pocket-book well filled with information. A discovery of possible importance was made soon afterwards. The robbery and all its known circumstances had got wind in the neighbourhood, and now a labourer, working by the Thames (which is distant from Petersham about five hundred yards) appeared, bearing the identical leathern bag which had been stolen. He had found it empty, stranded in some sedges by the river's brim. Fired by the astuteness of him who had just returned to town, I inquired which way the tide was running last evening. But, upon learning, no idea of any brilliance presented itself to me.

There was nothing to be done at Petersham;

the scamp and his ill-gotten possessions must be far enough away by this time; at least Mr. Plenderleath said so, and I now returned to London with him. All for the present then was over. All my suddenly acquired wealth had vanished, and I was a poor clerk again. Yet how infinitely happier might I consider myself now than in the past. "It may please God," I said to myself, "of His mercy to yet return perhaps as much as half of this good money; but it will not please Him to restore my terrible relation—that I am convinced about."

Upon first recalling my coming trip to Scotland I was minded to get excused of it, but quickly came to the conclusion that nothing better could have happened to me just now than a long journey upon other affairs than my own. It would take me out of myself, and give my wife and child a chance of recovering from the grief they must certainly be in upon hearing the sad news.

I wrote therefore to them on returning to my office, dined in the city, and finally repaired to Euston. At ten minutes to nine o'clock the "Flying Scotsman" steamed from the station, bearing with it, among other matters, a first-class carriage of which I was the sole occupant after leaving Rugby. I had books and newspapers, bought from force of habit, but was not likely to read them, for my mind contained more than sufficient material to feed upon. Very much of a trying character occupied my brains as I sat and listened to my flying vehicle. Now it roared like thunder as we rushed over bridges, now screamed triumphantly as we whirled past silent, deserted stations. Anon we went with a crash through archways, and once, with gradually slackening speed and groaning breaks, shrieked with impatience at a danger signal that barred the way. I watched the oil in the bottom of the lamp above me dribble from side to side with every

oscillation of the train, and the sight depressed me beyond measure. What irony of fate was this! Yesterday the London and North-Western Railway meant more than half my entire fortune; now the stoker who threw coals into the great fiery heart of the engine had more interest in the Company than I! Overcome with these gloomy thoughts, I drew around the lamp that lighted my carriage a sort of double silken shutter, and endeavoured to forget everything in sleep, if it were possible.

Sleep is as a rule not only possible but necessary to me after ten o'clock in the evening, and I soon slumbered soundly in spite of my tribulation.

Upon waking with a start I found I was no longer alone. The train was going at a tremendous pace; one of the circular curtains I had drawn about the lamp had been pulled up, leaving me in the shade, but lighting the other man who looked across from the further

corner in which he was sitting, and smiled at my surprise.

It was Joshua Beakbane.

I never experienced greater agony than in that waking moment, and until the man spoke, thereby convincing me by the tones of his voice that he was no spirit my mental suffering passes possibility of description in words.

"A fellow-traveller need not surprise you, sir," he said. "I got in at Crewe, and you were sleeping so soundly that I did not wake you. I took the liberty of reading your evening paper, however, and also gave myself a little light."

He was alive, and had quite failed to recognize me. I thanked him in as gruff a voice as I could assume and looked at my watch. We had been gone from Crewe above half an hour, and should be due at Wigan, our next stopping-place, in about twenty minutes.

Joshua Beakbane was a tall, heavily-built

man, with a flat, broad face, and a mouth that hardly suggested his great strength of purpose. His heavy moustache was inclined to reddishness, and his restless eyes had also something of red in them. He was clad in a loud tweed, with ulster and hat of the same material. The man had, moreover, aged much since I last saw him about five years ago. Finding me indisposed to talk, he took a portmanteau from the hat-rail above him, unstrapped a railway rug, wound it about his lower limbs, and then fell to arranging such brushes, linen, and garments as the portmanteau contained.

My benumbed senses were incapable of advancing any reason for what I saw. Why had this man seen fit to declare himself dead? What was his business in the North? Was it possible that he could be in league with the runaway clerk? Had I in reality seen him lurking in the house at Petersham?

An explanation to some of these difficulties was almost immediately forthcoming — as

villainous and shameful an explanation as ever unfortunate man stumbled upon. My enemy suddenly started violently, and glancing up, I found him staring with amazement and discomfort in his face at a paper that he held. Seeing me looking at him, he smothered his expression of astonishment and laughed.

"An infernal clerk of mine," he said, "has been using my business documents as he does my blotting-paper. He'll pay for this to-morrow."

For a brief moment Joshua Beakbane held the paper to the light, and what had startled him immediately did no less for me: it was a certain pencil portrait of the man himself on the back of a London and North-Western railway share certificate.

Some there are who would have tackled this situation with ease and perhaps come well out of it; but to me, that am a small and shiftless being at my best, the position I now found myself in was quite intolerable. I

would have given half my slender annual salary for a stiff glass of brandy-and-water. The recent discovery paralyzed me. I made no question that Joshua Beakbane had at least his share of the plunder with him in the portmanteau; but how to take advantage of the fact I could not imagine. Silence and pretended sleep were the first moves that suggested themselves. A look or word or hint that could suggest to the robber I remotely fathomed his secret, would doubtless mean for me a cut throat and no further interest in "The Flying Scotsman."

Wigan was passed and Preston not far distant when I bethought me of a plan that would, like enough, have occurred to any other in my position an hour earlier. I might possibly get a message on to the telegraph wires and have Joshua Beakbane stopped when he least expected such a thing. I wrote therefore on a leaf of my pocket-book, but did so in trembling, for should the man

I was working to overthrow catch sight of the words, even though he might not guess who I really was, he would at least take me for a detective in disguise, and all must then be over.

Thus I worded my telegram :—

"*Prepare to make big arrest at Carlisle. Small man will wave hand from first-class compartment. Flying Scotsman.*"

For me this was not bad. I doubled it up, put a sovereign in it, wrote on the outside—"Send this at all hazards," and prepared to dispose of it as best I might at Preston.

Then fresh terrors held me on every side. Would the robber by any unlucky chance be getting out at the next station? I made bold to ask him. He answered that Carlisle was his destination, and much relieved, I trusted that it might be so for some time.

At Preston I scarcely waited for the train

to stop before leaping to the platform—as luck would have it on the foot of a sleepy porter. He swore in the Lancashire dialect, and I pressed my message into his hand. I was already back in the carriage again when the fool—I can call him nothing less strong—came up to the window, held my communication under Joshua Beakbane's eye, and inquired what he was to do with it.

"It is a telegram to Glasgow," I told him, with my knees knocking together. "It *must* go. There's a sovereign inside for the man who sends it."

The dunder-headed fellow now grasped my meaning and withdrew, tolerably wide awake. Joshua Beakbane showed himself deeply interested in this business, and knowing what I did, it was clear to me from the searching questions he put that his suspicions were violently aroused.

The lie to the railway-porter was, so far as my memory serves me, the only one I

ever told in my life. Whether it was justified by circumstances I will not presume to decide. But to Joshua Beakbane I spoke the unvarnished truth concerning my trip northward. The pending trial at Glasgow had some element of interest in it; and my half-brother slowly lost the air of mistrust with which he had regarded me as I laid before him the documents relating to my mission.

The journey between Preston and Carlisle occupied a trifle more than two hours, though to me it appeared unending. A thousand times I wondered if my message had yet flashed past us in the darkness, and reflected how, on reaching Carlisle, I might best preserve my own safety and yet advance the ends of justice.

As we at last began to near the station Joshua Beakbane strapped his rug to his portmanteau, unlocked the carriage-door with a private key he now for the first time pro-

duced, and made other preparations for a speedy exit.

Upon my side of the train he would have to alight, and now, on looking eagerly from the carriage-window, though still some distance outside the station, I believed I could see a group of dark-coated men under the gas-lamps we were approaching. Leaning out of the train I waved my hand frantically to them. The next moment I was dragged back from inside.

"What are you doing?" my companion demanded.

"Signalling to friends," I answered boldly, and there must have been some chord in my voice that awoke old memories and new suspicions, for Beakbane immediately looked out of the window, saw the police, and turned upon me like a tiger.

"My God! I know you now," he yelled. "So you venture it at last?—then you shall have it." He hurled himself at me; his big

white hands closed like an iron collar round my neck; his thumbs pressed into my throat. A red mist filled my eyes, my brains seemed bursting through my skull; I believed the train must have rushed right through the station, and that he and I were flying into the lonely night once more. Then I became dimly conscious of a great wilderness of faces from the past staring at me, and all was blank. What followed I afterwards learned when slowly coming back to life again in the waiting-room at Carlisle.

Upon the police rushing to the carriage, Beakbane dashed me violently from him and jumped through that door of the compartment which was furthest from his pursuers. This he had just time to lock after him before he vanished into the darkness. But for the intervention of Providence, in the delay he thus caused the man might have escaped, at least, for that night. He successfully

threaded his way through a wilderness of motionless trucks and other rolling-stock. He then made for an engine-house, and having once passed it, would have climbed down a bank and so gained temporary safety. But at the moment he ran across the mouth of this shed an engine was moving from it, and before he could alter his course the locomotive knocked him down, pinned him to the rails, and slowly crushed over him. It was done in a moment, and his cry brought the police, who, at the moment of the accident, were wandering through the station in fruitless search. A doctor was now with Joshua Beakbane, but no human skill could even prolong life for the unfortunate man, and he lay dying as I staggered to my feet and entered the adjacent room where they had arranged a couch for him on the ground. He was unconscious as I took the big white hand that but a few minutes

before had been choking the life out of me; and soon afterwards, with an awful expression of pain, he expired.

As may be supposed I needed much care myself, after this frightful ordeal, and it was not until the following day at noon that my senses once more began to thoroughly define themselves. Then, upon an inquiry into the papers and property of the dead man, I found that all the missing sources of my fortune, with no exception, had been in his possession. Sorrell was thus to my mind proved innocent, and I shrewdly suspected that the unhappy young fellow had fallen a victim to this wretched soul, who was now himself dead.

I was fortunately able to proceed to Glasgow in the nick of time, to attend to my employer's business there. Upon returning to London, my arrival in Mr. Plenderleath's office with the missing fortune, created no less astonishment in his mind than that which filled my

own, when I learned how young Sorrell had been found alive and was fast recovering from his injuries. Let me break off here one moment to say that if I appear to have treated my half-brother's appalling death with cynical brevity, it is through no lack of feeling in the matter, but rather through lack of space.

At six o'clock in the morning, and about an hour after the time that Joshua Beakbane breathed his last, he then having fasted about three-and-thirty hours, Walter Sorrell was found gagged and tied, hand and foot, to the wall of a mean building, situate in a meadow not far distant from Oak Lodge. With his most unpleasing experiences I conclude my narrative.

After Mrs. Prescott's departure on the night of the robbery, he had read for about ten minutes, when, suddenly glancing up from his book, he saw, standing staring in at the window, the identical man whose

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portrait I had drawn for him. Starting up, convinced that what he had seen was no spirit, he unfastened the window and leapt into the garden only to find nothing. Returning, he had hastily left the drawing-room to get his stick, hat, and coat. He was scarcely a moment gone, and, on coming back, found Joshua Beakbane already with the bag and its contents in his hands. Sorrell rushed across the room to stay the other's escape; but too late—he had already rushed through the window. Grasping his heavy stick, the young man followed, succeeded in keeping the robber in sight, and finally closed with him, both falling violently into a bush of rhododendrons. Here an accomplice came to Beakbane's aid, and between them they soon had Sorrell senseless and a prisoner. He remembered nothing further, till coming to himself in the fowl-house, where he was ultimately found. His antagonists evidently carried him between them to this obscure

hiding-place; and there he had soon starved but for his fortunate discovery.

The said accomplice has never been found; it wants neither him, however, nor yet that other ally who sent the telegram from Newmarket, to tell us how Joshua Beakbane plotted to steal my fortune, three-fourths of which for the asking should have been his.

I regained my health more quickly than might be supposed, and young Sorrell was even a shorter time recovering from his starvation and bruises. I gave the worthy lad a thousand pounds, and much good may it do him.

The portrait of Joshua Beakbane, on the back of that London and North-Western railway share certificate, is still in my possession, and hangs where all may see it in the library of my new habitation. I now live far away on the coast of Cornwall where the great waves roll in, straight from the

heart of the Atlantic, where the common folk of the district make some stir when I pass them by, and where echoes from mighty London reverberate but peacefully in newspapers that are often a week old before I see them.

THE END.

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